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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 OTTAWA 000021

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AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PASS TO AMCONSUL QUEBEC

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SUBJECT: Canadian PM and NATO S-G Discuss Afghanistan, the Strategic Concept, and the Arctic

REF: OTTAWA 24

CLASSIFIED BY: Scott Bellard, Political Minister Counselor,
Department of State, Political Section; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C/NF) Summary. In a meeting in Ottawa with the NATO Secretary General, PM Harper promised to consider a training role in Afghanistan after Canada's combat mission ends in 2011, while noting the importance of managing messaging to avoid characterizations of "withdrawal." Mounting Canadian deaths, the perceived lack of progress on the ground, and a problematic Afghan Government are eroding public support in Canada for the mission. Canada wants to see strong and capable expeditionary forces within NATO, and rejects any "sphere of influence" for Russia. Canada opposes a NATO role in the Arctic. End summary.

¶2. (C/NF) Canadian Prime Minister Steven Harper met on January 13 in Ottawa with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen in a series of sessions devoted to Afghanistan, the NATO Strategic Concept, and the Arctic. According to Kelly Anderson, Deputy Director of the Defence and Security Relations Division at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, the meetings with the PM were unfortunately overshadowed by unfolding events in Haiti. SecGen Rasmussen met separately with Minister of National Defence Peter McKay and Chief of the Defence Staff General Walt Natynczyk. Rasmussen also visited Canadian troops who had recently returned from Afghanistan.

¶3. (C/NF) According to Anderson, SecGen Rasmussen assured his Canadian interlocutors that he was not coming to Ottawa to "cause problems" related to the 2011 end of the Canadian combat mission in Afghanistan that the Canadian House of Commons had mandated in March 2008. In his media appearances, the Secretary General avoided criticism of Canada's decision and refrained from calling for a reversal of the decision. The media also sought to draw him into the current politically-charged debate over treatment of Afghan detainees transferred to Afghan custody by Canadian Forces. In his meeting with the PM, SecGen Rasmussen sought Canadian commitment to a post-2011 role in training Afghan security forces as part of the NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan. PM Harper promised that the government would look at the possibility, while noting the difficulties in providing effective training outside Afghanistan.

4, (C/NF) SecGen Rasmussen and PM Harper agreed on the importance of managing the messaging related to the 2011 target also set by President Obama for troop reductions if warranted by conditions on the ground. It is important that this not be interpreted as a date for withdrawal of NATO forces. PM Harper observed that the U.S. target date was "not helpful politically" to his government, especially if he needs to make the case for continued Canadian engagement. SecGen Rasmussen expressed concern that the Canadian withdrawal in 2011 could produce a "domino effect," increasing domestic pressure on Germany and France to withdraw as well. PM Harper rejected the parallel, saying that Canada has "been there in a big way" and that the circumstances of Canada's decision are not comparable to other ISAF troop contributors.

15. (C/NF) PM Harper described the three major domestic vulnerabilities he faces with respect to retaining support for the Afghanistan mission, with the mounting Canadian death toll (so far, 139 troop deaths, one reporter, one diplomat, and two aid workers) the most damaging. The perceived lack of progress on the ground in Afghanistan is a second challenge that also saps public support. Furthermore, there is the "problematic" Afghan government, which raises questions of legitimacy and effectiveness. PM Harper said that he supports and encourages the transition to Afghan lead on security, urging a special focus on police. He argued that the Canadian "Village Approach" provides a successful model that could be useful in planning for ISAF transition. The PM urged that transition to Afghan lead at the provincial level should be done "as much as possible, as soon as possible," wherever conditions

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allow.

16. (C/NF) In a subsequent discussion on the NATO Strategic Concept, PM Harper commented that it should be "short, with a focus on key issues." He reiterated a long-standing Canadian call for the development of strong and capable expeditionary forces within NATO militaries. He urged continued transformation away from territorial defense toward forces able to deploy rapidly where they are needed, whether out-of-area or in response to a territorial threat to a member nation under Article 5. PM Harper also called for closer civilian-military coordination, urging that NATO forces must be structured to work more closely with civilian elements, especially UN missions. SecGen Rasmussen noted that he had recently been at a retreat with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, where these issues were also under discussion. He suggested inviting the UN Secretary General to the Lisbon Summit. SecGen Rasmussen also told PM Harper that the Strategic Concept will offer a vehicle for reform and streamlining within NATO, and that he plans to draft the document.

17. (C/NF) SecGen Rasmussen opined that Russia does want a cooperative relationship with NATO. PM Harper commented that Moscow needs to work more constructively with the international community. He specifically rejected any notion that Russia had a claim to a "sphere of influence," and argued that it is important that NATO maintain its "Open Door" policy. SecGen Rasmussen observed that, in order to improve NATO-EU cooperation, "we need to solve Cyprus." Despite the political challenges, he cited a need for arrangements with the EU that make practical cooperation possible in theaters such as Afghanistan, where it is vital to success.

18. (C/NF) In side comments following the lunch session, PM Harper cautioned SecGen Rasmussen that he saw no NATO role in the Arctic. PM Harper contended that it is not like Antarctica, in that the Arctic is inhabited and largely delineated by defined national territory. It should not be a center for future conflict; practical issues such as Search and Rescue are addressed by the

Arctic Council. According to PM Harper, Canada has a good working relationship with Russia with respect to the Arctic, and a NATO presence could backfire by exacerbating tensions. He commented that there is no likelihood of Arctic states going to war, but that some non-Arctic members favored a NATO role in the Arctic because it would afford them influence in an area where ""they don't belong."" (Note: Deputy Director Anderson commented to pol/miloff that FM Cannon had specifically requested points on NATO and the Arctic in preparation for his meeting with Secretary Clinton on January 22 in order to underline the importance of the issue to Canada. End note)
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